



## INDIAN STRATEGIES IN POST-WAR AFGHANISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

India and Afghanistan have been geo-politically and strategically very important to each other so the relations between the two nations can be traced back from the depth of history. The relations took a new look after the fall of Taliban and establishment of democratic government in Afghanistan and India maintained a great influence in post-war political, socio-economic and developmental aspect of Afghanistan. While dealing with war torn Afghanistan India adopted a proper system of strategies not only to further its interests but also to benefit the Afghan nation. These strategies range from seeking political influence in Afghanistan to stability of the Afghan political system, from seeking economic influence to provide development aid to Afghanistan and also from security and stability in Afghanistan to provide military assistance. This paper focuses on the analysis of the strategies of India in post-war Afghanistan.

**Key Words:** India, Afghanistan, Strategies, Aid, Support, Influence, Security, Stability, Power.

### INTRODUCTION

The origin of the bond of relationship between India and Afghanistan lies in the geographical proximity between these two nations which has been a permanent variable in their relations. Indo- Afghan relationship took a new shape after the war in Afghanistan and Indian involvement in Afghanistan got a moral boost after the establishment of interim government in 2001. Being a close neighboring country, India felt much concerned for the Afghan rehabilitation and reconstruction for which India provided a huge economic assistance to Afghanistan. India is the fifth largest donor to Afghanistan and the first in South Asia. India is one of the closest regional powers which has invested in the development of afghan institutions and infrastructure and is always trying to maintain a good influence in Afghanistan.

The strategic partnership which was signed between India and Afghanistan on October 4, 2011 during the Afghan President Hamid Karzia's visit to India has been a very important landmark in the relationship of these two countries. Despite India's huge domestic needs, India has provided \$2 billion aid to Afghanistan since 2001.<sup>1</sup> But while dealing with Afghanistan, India's policy towards it is based on proper and planned strategies which act as the underlying basis and the guiding principles of the Indian involvement in Afghanistan and these planned strategies of India in Afghanistan are as under.

### **EXERT INFLUENCE IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE OF AFGHANISTAN**

After the fall of Taliban in Afghanistan, India whole heartedly supported for the establishment of democratic political setup in the Afghanistan. India supported the government under Hamid Karzai in order to ensure that Afghanistan does not become a base for anti-Indian activities for which India strongly tried to seek political influence in Afghan government. India worked hard to support the Karzia administration and to build the democratic institutions with multi-ethnic participation in order to minimize the Pasthun influence and improve the Afghan security as well.<sup>2</sup>

India for the sake of national interest established a sustainable diplomatic presence in Afghanistan with the advent of the fall of taliban and India reopened its embassy in Kabul and Consulates in Kandahar and Jalalabad. India later opened the Consulates in Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif which are the major commercial centers in western and northern parts of Afghanistan. This diplomatic presence enabled India to establish relationship with the local leaders in Afghanistan, facilitate trade and investment and provide awareness of the local developments. This move of India was alleged by Pakistan that India uses these offices for the intelligence purpose and support the separatist movement in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan and the Pakistan foreign ministry asserted that “Indian consulates in Kandahar and Jalalabad are a veritable base for RAW (Research and Intelligence Wing, Indian Intelligence Service) and its accessories”<sup>3</sup> which was denied by India.

During the Taliban rule, India also supported the Northern Alliance comprised of mainly Tajiks and Uzbek ethnic groups because of its hostility to Pakistani supported activities.<sup>4</sup> Delhi supported the Northern Alliance movement with all possible means and Indian military also constructed a field hospital in Tajikistan for the same purpose.<sup>5</sup> Some in India asserted that Indian government resumed support to its erstwhile allies as a counterweight to Pasthun insurgents and as a hedge against the Taliban’s potential return.<sup>6</sup>

### **AID FOR DEVELOPMENT AND EXERT ECONOMIC INFLUENCE**

The Afghan government has been in desperate need to improve Afghan economy and create jobs to further undermine the Taliban and improve security situations. Asserting social and economic development as a key to ensure Afghanistan as a source of regional stability,<sup>7</sup> Delhi adopted a huge assistance policy.

India provides more foreign aid to Afghanistan than to any other country.<sup>8</sup> It is Afghanistan’s fifth most significant source of development assistance and its largest South Asian donor.<sup>9</sup> India provided \$1.3 billion in aid to Afghanistan as of early 2011, though subsequent pledges have raised this amount to \$2 billion since 2001.<sup>10</sup> Indian initiatives promoted the legitimacy of Karzai administration, both by offering Programmes to enhance good governance and by focusing Indian support on Karzai’s development priorities like infrastructure, Training, Education, Healthcare, Agriculture, Telecommunications, Power generation and Civil Aviation.<sup>11</sup> These projects range from small community level projects to the construction of large scale Power generation and transmission infrastructure.<sup>12</sup>

For the promotion of trade India and Afghanistan signed a Preferential Trade Agreement in 2003 which reduced duties in Afghan exports to India, primarily agricultural goods.<sup>13</sup> This was an

extremely important accord given that fully one-quarter of Afghanistan's exports are destined for Indian markets, with bilateral trade which was expected to reach as much as \$1 billion by 2012.<sup>14</sup> Indian companies also entered the Afghan market particularly in agriculture, manufacturing, telecommunications and mining sectors. In 2011 14 Indian firms bid on an iron mining contract in Bamyán province, that generate \$6 billion in investment.<sup>15</sup> In November 2011 at the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit in Maldives, President Hamid Karzai asked Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to encourage more Indian investment in Afghanistan. The then Afghan commerce minister Anwar -ul- Haq Ahady also invited Indian small and medium enterprises in October 2011.<sup>16</sup>

Though the Indian reconstruction strategy is designed to highlight Indian munificence, expand trade and gain political and economic influence in Afghanistan, It is also designed to undermine Pakistani influence in Afghanistan.<sup>17</sup>

### **REGIONALIZE SOLUTIONS TO SECURITY AND STABILITY PROBLEMS OF AFGHANISTAN**

India opted to pursue regional solutions to Afghan security and Stability Problems to enable the all South and Central Asian governments to take stakes in its success and in the words of the statement of external affairs ministry, "this is to enable all the countries of this region to advance together through Free trade, open borders and regional economic integration".<sup>18</sup> This approach is also aimed to dilute the Pakistani influence on Afghan affairs, which in turn has also been believed that it will enable Kabul to be more independent and less subject to Pakistani army twisting.

An important aspect of Indian regional approach has been to promote Afghanistan's membership in SAARC in order to institutionalize the Afghan's integration with its neighbors and to foster the two way trade between the States.<sup>19</sup> Afghanistan's integration into regional economy has been estimated to generate as much as \$2 billion in regional activity, including \$ 600 million for Afghanistan.<sup>20</sup> This strategy also helps to establish Afghanistan as a viable land bridge between India and the energy rich CARs.

### **POWER PROJECTION**

In a dilemma of whether to deploy additional forces or not to protect its aid and investment projects has been a significant debate for India, as it reconsider its Afghan Policy. However it is only one aspect of a broader discussion about how India can project Power in South Asia and beyond. The Indian academician Shantie Mariet D'Souza wrote that "the dilemma confronting Indian policy makers on Afghanistan is not merely limited to the country's specific interests and engagement in the reconstruction activities but stems from India's quest to play a large role in regional and global affairs."<sup>21</sup>

By playing a critical role in Afghanistan's security and economic development, India hopes to shape regional developments and project Power throughout South Asia and beyond. Indian foreign Secretary Nirupama Rap once asserted that "India's emergence as a world power requires a peaceful and stable neighborhood and external environment. This suggests that India sees stability in Afghanistan as a key prerequisite for achieving its overarching strategic goals."<sup>22</sup> Harsh V Pant, a Kings College Professor asserts that "the success of India's Afghanistan

policy will go a long way in determining if India will be able to emerge as a provider of regional security in South Asia.”<sup>23</sup>

### **EXTENDING MILITARY AID TO AFGHANISTAN**

Military might has been one main area in which India has not projected its power in Afghanistan. Though India deployed 500 ITBP personnel to protect Indian aid workers and diplomats in Afghanistan, these security personnel were not tasked with any offensive counter insurgency or stabilization mission. Further although India provided military training to the Afghan National Army in India,<sup>24</sup> it has avoided greater military involvement for so many reasons. The main among these reasons is that Indian leaders realize Indian troops would made easy targets for Afghan militants and that Indian military development to Afghanistan could embolden more anti India activities.

India has been seen to have taken more assertive approach regarding the military cooperation with Afghanistan. As part a strategic partnership agreement signed by Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in October 2011, India agreed to provide light weapons, training in high altitude warfare to the Afghan Army, Police and Air force.<sup>25</sup> The accord fall far short of calling for the dispatch of Indian troops to Afghanistan. Nevertheless despite the Pakistani’s opposition, India has decided to engage in a bilateral security partnership with Afghanistan.

### **CONCLUSION**

On the above discussed points it can be concluded that Indian reconstruction and rehabilitation policy for Afghanistan has been successful in achieving both the ends that is in rebuilding the Afghan nation and maintaining its prominent influence in all the main and necessary aspects of Afghanistan. This shows that India has also been successful in maintaining its planned strategies in Afghanistan which have worked to a large extent so far the Indian national interest are concerned.

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<sup>10</sup>The \$1.3 billion figure is taken from Robert O. Blake Jr., assistant secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “The Obama Administration’s Priorities in South and Central Asia,” remarks, Houston, Texas, January 19, 2011a. See also “Obama Appreciates India’s Role in Afghanistan,” *The Hindu*, November 7, 2010; and “India’s Role in Afghanistan” ,2011.

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<sup>12</sup>External Publicity Division, 2009, pp. 19–20, 26–31.

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